



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

## [Review of] Gweltaz Guyomarc'h, L'unité de la métaphysique selon Alexandre d'Aphrodise

### Citation for published version:

Kupreeva, I 2017, '[Review of] Gweltaz Guyomarc'h, L'unité de la métaphysique selon Alexandre d'Aphrodise', *Philosophie Antique*, vol. 17, pp. 225-227. <https://doi.org/10.4000/philosant.318>

### Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.4000/philosant.318](https://doi.org/10.4000/philosant.318)

### Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

### Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

### Published In:

*Philosophie Antique*

### General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

### Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



---

## Gweltaz GUYOMARC'H, *L'unité de la métaphysique selon Alexandre d'Aphrodise*

Inna Kupreeva

---



### Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/philosant/318>

DOI : 10.4000/philosant.318

ISSN : 2648-2789

### Éditeur

Éditions Vrin

### Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 novembre 2017

Pagination : 225-227

ISBN : 978-2-7574-1807-9

ISSN : 1634-4561

### Référence électronique

Inna Kupreeva, « Gweltaz GUYOMARC'H, *L'unité de la métaphysique selon Alexandre d'Aphrodise* », *Philosophie antique* [En ligne], 17 | 2017, mis en ligne le 01 novembre 2018, consulté le 25 septembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/philosant/318> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/philosant.318>

---



La revue *Philosophie antique* est mise à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.

Gweltaz GUYOMARC'H : *L'unité de la métaphysique selon Alexandre d'Aphrodise*, Paris, Vrin, 2015 (Textes et traditions, 27), 351 p., ISBN : 978-2-7116-2677-9.

Alexander's extant *Metaphysics* commentary covering the first five books has been traditionally often consulted by the students of *Metaphysics* for matters textual and exegetical, but not much studied on its own as an original work of philosophy. The recent growth of interest in ancient philosophical commentary as a vehicle of doing philosophy led to a greater appreciation of Alexander as a philosopher, and in the last quarter of a century we have seen several studies of his *Metaphysics* commentary with focus on the philosophical project of Alexander and the place of Aristotle's *Metaphysics in it* (the reverse of the traditional order of priorities). The significant landmarks are the first English translation of the commentary by Dooley and Madigan (1989-1993), the collection of papers edited by Movia (2002), the first Italian translation by the team of scholars led by Movia (2007), Maddalena Bonelli's monograph on metaphysics as demonstrative science (2004). There is a lot of new work on the text and tradition of Alexander's commentary, by S. Fazzo, M. Hecquet, M. Kotwick, P. Golitsis. Pantelis Golitsis is preparing a new critical edition of the commentary. All these publications come against a background of growing interest in all aspects Alexander's philosophical legacy, with the works by Sharples, Rashed, Caston, Chiaradonna leading the field. The new book by Gweltaz Guyomarc'h is another important work on this front.

The book is devoted to a study of Alexander's 'unitarian' reading of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as one book and one philosophical project. It consists of three chapters.

The first chapter entitled 'Alexander, Philosopher and Exegete', contextualises the problem of unity in the philosophical discussions on the age of Alexander, in the work of earlier commentators and in Alexander's own exegetical practice. The author discusses the status of metaphysics as a philosophical discipline, in relation to the philosophical curriculum of Alexander's time, still largely dominated by the Hellenistic division into logic, physics, and ethics, with the metaphysics, like the Arlesienne of the title play, never seen but always present behind the scenes of the philosophical mainstream. In his search for the intellectual niche for Aristotle's *Metaphysics* the author formulates three criteria for the type of philosophical knowledge it represents: universality of scope, rationality of methods, and search for the first principles. These criteria are reflected in Alexander's philosophical and exegetical project, which is based on a 'unitarian' approach to both the composition and the philosophical argument of the treatise. The survey of the titles used by Alexander for this new discipline shows his preference for the 'first philosophy', or 'first wisdom', used interchangeably with 'the study of being *qua* being' and 'theology' from the very beginning throughout. Among Alexander's predecessors in commenting on the *Metaphysics*, apart from possibly Eudorus, and certainly Aspasius, we should mention also Alexander's teacher Aristotle the Younger, more often referred to as Aristotle of Mytilene (*In Metaph.* 166, 19-20 Hayduck). Another interesting case to consider is Aristocles of Messina (perhaps late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC), who in his work *On Philosophy* uses Aristotle's arguments in *Metaph.* 4.4-5 against those who deny the law of contradiction as a framework in which to deploy his own criticisms of Pyrrhonists, as well as different views on the epistemic status of sense perception, perhaps giving us a glimpse of the possible place of *Metaphysics* in the context of Hellenistic debates.

The title of the second chapter, 'Metaphysics as the universal and first science', captures the main tension in Alexander's treatment of the subject of the first philosophy. This chapter forms the core of the book, demonstrating Alexander's exegetical progress through the first five books of the *Metaphysics* as designed to form a step-by-step

realisation of the programme of first philosophy as a demonstrative science of being *qua* being, which also accommodates without inconsistency the task of a study of the first principles.

The author shows that the search for the first principles, far from being a simple reduction of all metaphysics to theology narrowly construed, allows Alexander to introduce the principle of 'the causality of the maximum', on the lines of *propter quod alia id maximum tale* (from ἕκαστον δὲ μάλιστα αὐτὸ τῶν ἄλλων καθ' ὃ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπάρχει τὸ συνώνυμον in α 1, 993b24-25, replacing Aristotle's strict synonymy with homonymy). Alexander applies it as a kind of 'bridge' principle connecting different ontological levels in the Aristotelian system by means on an *a fortiori* argument, for instance, when arguing that the causes of the eternal heavenly bodies are more eternal than these bodies.

The universality of metaphysics is understood by Alexander as direct: every *x* is an object of metaphysics by virtue of its being *x*, and not just by virtue of being causally dependent on some special proper object of metaphysics. Guyomarc'h shows how Alexander develops the technical concept of ὑπαρξις, which could be translated as 'existence', to articulate the existential mode for each of the kinds of being as distinguished in the *Categories*, without drawing a contrast between essence and existence or postulating an ontologically independent existence. 'Existence' so understood allows both the universal applicability and the non-reductive interpretation of being *qua* being.

The author discusses Alexander's view on epistemic priority of the first philosophy in relation to other sciences as being architectonic, foundational, and a model of demonstrative science. These features of metaphysics depend on its universality and having the first principles as its object, and on its use of the definitional-demonstrative model of the *Posterior Analytics*. At the same time, these features give Alexander's version of the first philosophy resemblance of the *mathesis universalis* of the kind that is rejected by Aristotle in *Posterior Analytics*. Guyomarc'h's diagnosis of the source of this ostensible departure from Aristotle and towards Plato seems to be that Alexander points out the need for the demonstrative science to work on the principles of demonstration, even if in a non-demonstrative way, the view that is well-received by the Platonist commentators (p.164-65). But it is not clear that Alexander's reasons for his claim are the same as those of the Platonists for embracing it: his understanding of the role of dialectic as contributing towards the first principles is certainly much more circumscribed compared to the scope of Platonic dialectic (cf. Alexander in *Metaph.* 174, 2-4 and discussion in his *Topics* commentary)

Guyomarc'h resists reading Alexander as dealing with two fundamentally different metaphysical projects, the 'general' metaphysics with a direct universal scope and the 'special' metaphysics with focussing on the first principles, where unification could only be achieved as a reduction of one project to the other. He points out that for Alexander, this science is both universal and first. In a meticulous study of the three problematic passages which appear to give divergent views on the nature of metaphysics and its place in the relation to other kinds of philosophical knowledge ((1) first philosophy in general, 'under which' there are (i) first philosophy understood closer to theology, (ii) physics, (iii) ethics (245, 25-246, 13); (2) first philosophy = theology; second philosophy = astronomy; third philosophy = physics (250, 21-251, 38); (3) defending the view of first philosophy as both the study of the first principles and all being as a whole, distinguishing this one discipline from physics, 266, 5-18), Guyomarc'h shows how the passages can be seen as different progressive stages of the same strategy rather than a series of random inconsistent *ad hoc* remarks. He discusses the place of logic in Alexander's metaphysical

project as the product of the first philosophy, and offers some very interesting remarks on the first passage above showing how metaphysics subsumes logic and takes its place in the old tripartite Hellenistic division.

The third chapter 'The objects of metaphysics' shows how the results of this analysis of the scope and tasks of metaphysics can be applied to explain in a unified way the variety of objects this science deals with, from the most widely dispersed non-substantial being to the most unique first unmoved mover. Since the link between the higher and lower ontological orders is construed as explanatory/causal, this leads us to the discussion of the mechanism of the three types of causation: the causation of substance with relation to non-substantial beings, the causation of form with respect to substance, and the causation of the separate form, the first unmoved mover, in relation to the human intellect and to the world as a whole (theology). In all three cases, the 'bridge' principle of the causality of the maximum described above is deployed in order to provide a link between the different ontological levels. This principle works to explain the causal priority of substance over non-substantial beings, without making the latter the mere tropes of the former: to ensure this, Alexander develops the concept of a kind of being that is 'intermediate' between the substance and the accident that is fully dependent on a substance: the corresponding relation is that of 'strong' homonymy ἀφ' ἐνός and πρὸς ἑν, between the substance and the related non-substances. The same principle of causal priority works also in the case of form-substance over composite substance. This section is most interesting in light of the recent discussions of Alexander's essentialism vs attributivism of earlier Peripatetics (Andronicus, Boethus). Guyomarc'h argues that Alexander's account of form-substance can in fact accommodate Boethus' view of form as a quality as a partial or incomplete account to the extent that it agrees with the causal priority of substance. Particularly interesting and apt is Guyomarc'h's explanation (even if written out in broad strokes) of how the causality of the maximum works in Alexander's noetics, to explain the relation between the divine intellect and human intellect. This argument in Alexander's *De anima* (88, 26-89, 11) is often taken by readers to be a Platonic influence, and showing its roots in Alexander's considered interpretation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is thus a very important result.

On the whole, the book is excellent, very rich, thought provoking, engaging, eminently readable. Guyomarc'h has not only worked with great care through many little studied texts of Alexander and provided a convincing account of Alexander's overall argument in the *Metaphysics* commentary. He has also done an exemplary work of finding the place of this argument with all its complex developments in modern discussions of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, with which he is fully engaged throughout the book, making many interesting suggestions and shedding new light on many old and controversial topics. This is a very significant contribution to the field, and a must read for all students of Alexander and Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

Inna Kupreeva  
University of Edinburgh

Wilhelm KROLL, *Discours sur les oracles chaldaïques*, traduction par H. D. Saffrey, Paris, Vrin, 2016 (Textes et traditions, 28), 126 p., ISBN : 978-2-7116-2746-2.

(Toutes références données aux pages de la traduction, et non de l'œuvre originale traduite).

Plus d'un siècle après sa première parution (Breslau 1894), la dissertation latine de W. Kroll (ci-après : K.), ouvrage majeur qui fit accéder l'étude des *Oracles chaldaïques* (ci-après : OC) à un statut scientifique, trouve une seconde naissance à travers la